



smooth softshell turtle

Apalone mutica

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudines
Family: Trionychidae

Features

The female smooth softshell turtle is usually seven to 14 inches long, while the male is typically five to seven inches long. This turtle's shell is soft, smooth, and leathery with no scales or scutes (plates). It gives the animal a pancake-like appearance. The plastron (lower shell) is white. A single light stripe extends from the eye to the throat on each side of the head. The smooth softshell turtle has a pointed nose.

Natural History

The smooth softshell turtle lives in large rivers with many sand bars and clean, sandy bottoms. It tends to avoid small streams and tributaries in Iowa. It eats crustaceans, fish, amphibians, insects, and mollusks (snails, slugs, and others). It searches for food in the early morning and late evening. It is a powerful swimmer and also moves well on land. It buries itself in sand with only the head sticking out far enough to reach above the water's surface for breathing. It will bury itself in mud to overwinter. The mating season lasts from April through May. The female becomes mature at seven years of age. She deposits eggs in a sandbank near the river

during early summer. The site is always in direct sunlight. The number of eggs produced (four to 33) depends on the female's size (the larger her size, the greater the number of eggs). Most eggs hatch in September. Numbers have declined recently, but it is still moderately abundant in the boundary waters and large rivers of southern Iowa.

Habitats

interior rivers and streams; Mississippi River; Missouri River

Iowa Status

common, native

Iowa Range

scattered throughout Iowa in suitable habitats

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.